DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 408 711 EC 305 421

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TITLE Outcomes for Students with Disabilities: Implications for Policy and Practice.
PUB DATE 96
NOTE 14p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Council for Exceptional Children (74th, Salt Lake City, UT, April 9-13, 1996).
AVAILABLE FROM Dr. Barbara Ysseldyke, Northwestern College, 101 7th St., S.W., Orange City, IA 51041 ($5).
PUB TYPE Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Administrative Attitudes; *Disabilities; Educational Change; *Educational Policy; Educational Practices; Elementary Secondary Education; *Inclusive Schools; Mainstreaming; National Surveys; Program Implementation; *State Departments of Education
IDENTIFIERS *State Directors of Special Education

ABSTRACT

This study, based on the findings of a doctoral dissertation by the author, compared the policies and procedures adopted by state special education agencies concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education and evaluated the level of implementation of inclusive practices. Responses of 36 state directors of special education (19 of whom submitted inclusion policies and procedures) were analyzed. Findings indicated: (1) state directors were reluctant to report that their state practiced full inclusion; (2) state directors had differing views of what constituted inclusion policies and procedures; (3) approximately 85% of the 36 directors of special education indicated that inclusion had increased in their state since 1990; (4) some state directors appeared to view "least restrictive environment" and "inclusion" as synonymous terms; and (5) state policies and procedures developed at the state level did not make a noticeable difference on inclusive practices in the states. Also included in the report are position statements on inclusion by major organizations and 14 graphs detailing the survey responses. (Author/DB)

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ED 408 750

Status of Policies, Procedures, and Practices: State Directors of Special Education Perceptions Regarding Implementation of Inclusion

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B. Top

> "Some years ago we came to view inclusion as a subject of restructuring of the entire educational system. From this perspective, we no longer view special education as a means to help students meet the demands of the classroom, but rather as a part of the classroom services that must be available to accommodate the learning needs of all children in a restructured school."
>
> (Director of Special Education Services of the South Burlington, Vermont School District National Study of Inclusive Education (1994, p. 148)

This poster session addresses the findings of a doctoral dissertation, written by Barbara Top at the University of South Dakota, and completed May, 1996.

The purpose of the study, positions of selected agencies, the research questions, graphs displaying results of the study, the findings, conclusions, and recommendations are included in this paper.

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Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to examine and compare the inclusion policies and procedures adopted by the fifty states and the District of Columbia special education agencies concerning the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education.

A secondary purpose was to examine the level of implementation of inclusive practices in states where policies and procedures had been adopted. Finally, the perception of state special education directors in states without policies and procedures was sought regarding implementation of inclusive practices.

Position Statements

NJCLD Position

Many children and youth with diverse learning needs can and should be educated within the regular education classroom. This setting is appropriate for some, but not all, students with learning disabilities. More than 90% of students with learning disabilities are taught in regular education classrooms for part of their school day. When p rovided appropriate support within this setting, many of these students can achieve academically and develop positive self-esteem and social skills. The regular education classroom is one of many educational program options but is not a substitute for the full continuum necessary to assure the provision of an appropriate education for all students."

(Journal of Learning Disabilities, May 1993, p. 330)

AFT - Shanker

"In calling for all disabled children to be placed in regular classrooms regardless of the nature and severity of their difficulty is replacing one injustice with another."

(p. 19) He indicated that we need to discard the ideology that inclusion in a regular classroom is the only appropriate placement for a child with a disability and get back to the idea of a continuum of placements.

(Educational Leadership, 1994)

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question One: How did the adopted state inclusion policies and procedures differ according to selected criteria?

Research Question Two: How did adopted inclusion policies and procedures differ among and between federal circuit courts of appeal?

Research Question Three: How did state special education directors perceive the levels of implementation of inclusive practices when adopted policies and procedures did and did not exist?

Research Question Four: According to state special education directors, what were the reported inclusive practices in states with and without adopted policies and procedures?

Research Question Five: To what extent was the concept of inclusion moving in the direction of full inclusive practice?

Graphs

Following are the thirty-six states who responded to the study. Fifteen state directors of special education indicated their state had adopted inclusion policies and procedures, and twenty-one states indicated they did not have adopted inclusion policies and procedures. For the purpose of the study, the states were divided into six regions according to circuit court of appeals districts.

States/Regions With and Without Adopted Inclusion Policies and Procedures
N=36

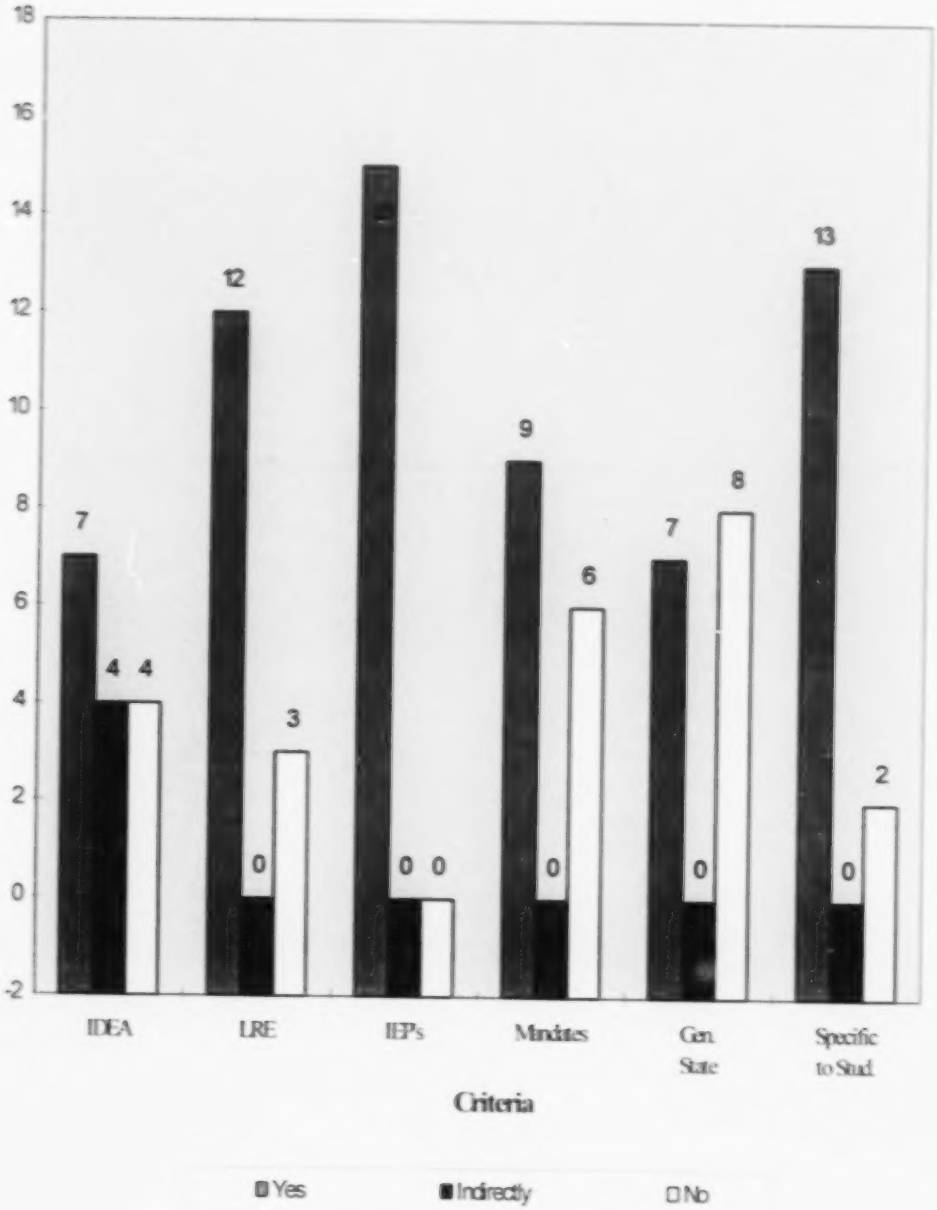
State	Region	Policies & Proced	No Policies & Proced
Connecticut	1		X
Delaware	1		X
New Hampshire	1		X
New Jersey	1	X	
New York	1		X
Pennsylvania	1	X	
Rhode Island	1		X
Vermont	1		X
Maryland	2	X	
Michigan	2	X	
North Carolina	2	X	
Ohio	2		X
Washington, DC	2		X
West Virginia	2	X	
Alabama	3		X
Florida	3	X	
Georgia	3		X
Louisiana	3		X
Texas	3	X	
Arkansas	4		X
Illinois	4		X
Iowa	4	X	
Minnesota	4		X
Missouri	4		X
Nebraska	4		X
Wisconsin	4		X
Colorado	5		X
Kansas	5	X	
Oklahoma	5	X	
Utah	5	X	
Wyoming	5	X	
Arizona	6		X
California	6	X	
Montana	6		X
Nevada	6	X	
Oregon	6		X

(Research Question One)

Graph 1

Six Criteria: Inclusion in State Policies and Procedures

N=15

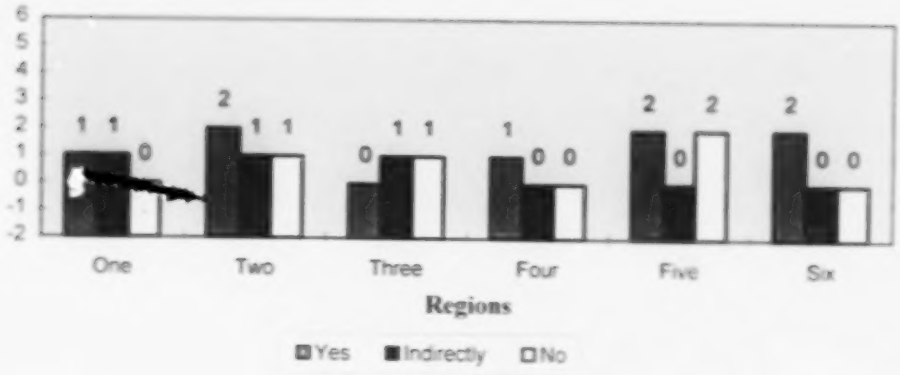


(Research Question Two)

Graph 2

Criterion One: Reference Made to IDEA

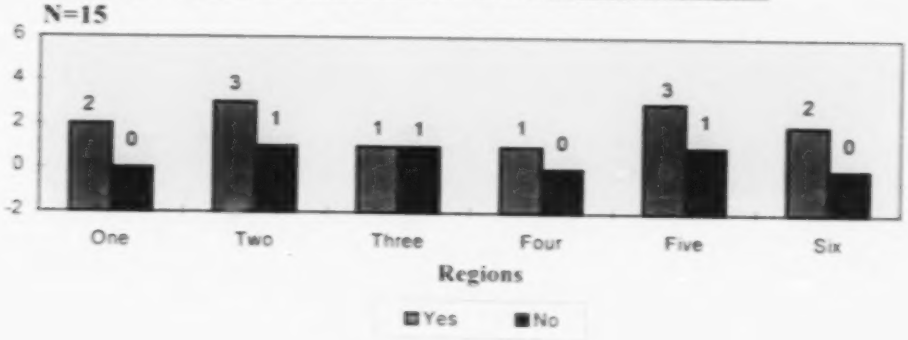
N = 15



Graph 3

Criterion Two: Reference to Least Restrictive Environment

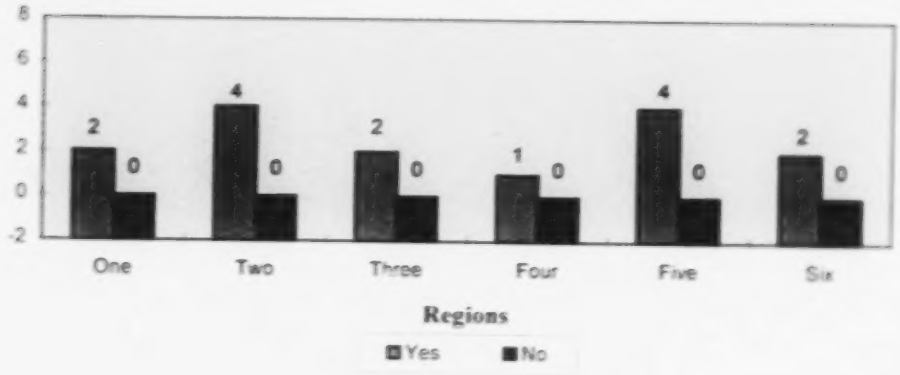
N=15



Graph 4

Criterion Three: Reference to IEPs

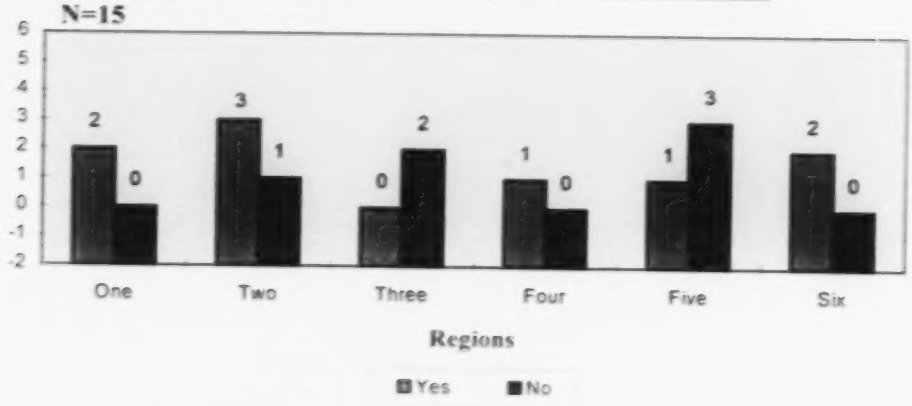
N=15



Graph 5

Criterion Four: Mandates Given to Schools RE: Inclusion

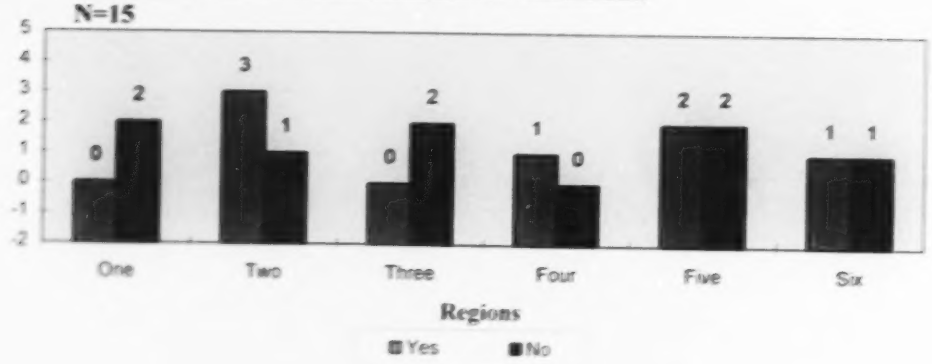
N=15



Graph 6

Criterion Five: Generalized Statements to Schools

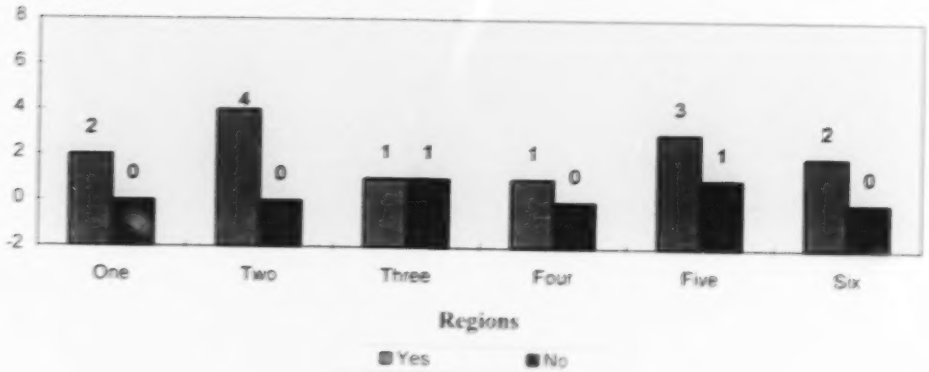
N=15



Graph 7

Criterion Six: Specific to Student RE: Inclusion

N=15

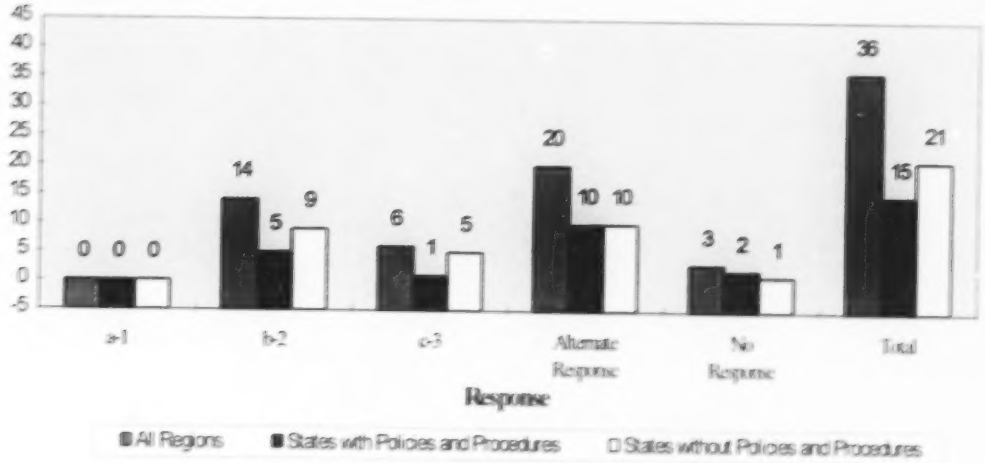


(Research Question Three)

Graph 8

Levels of Inclusive Practices in States With and Without Policies and Procedures

N=36



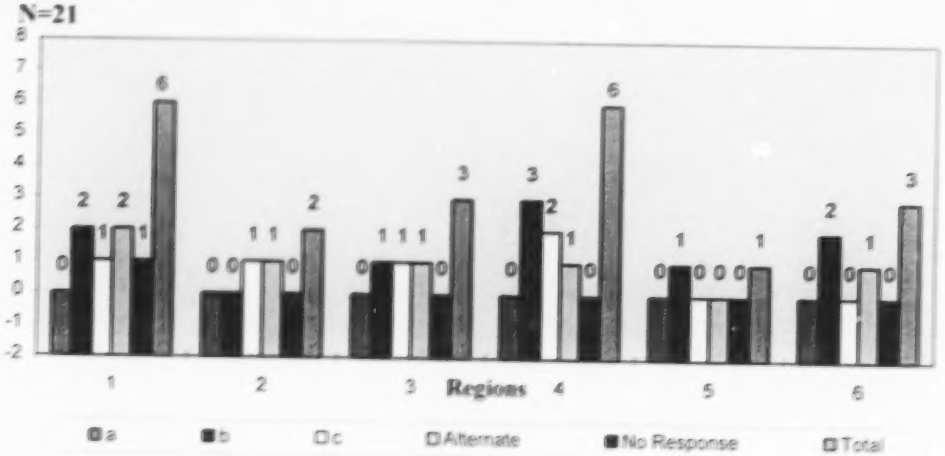
a[1] = full inclusion - all services in general classroom
b[2] = inclusion - in neighborhood school, major portion of day in general classroom
c[3] = minimal inclusion - limited time in general classroom

a = full inclusion - all services in general classroom
b = inclusion - in neighborhood school, major portion of day in general classroom
c = minimal inclusion - limited time in general classroom

Graph 10

Levels of Inclusive Practices in Regions Without Policies and Procedures

N=21



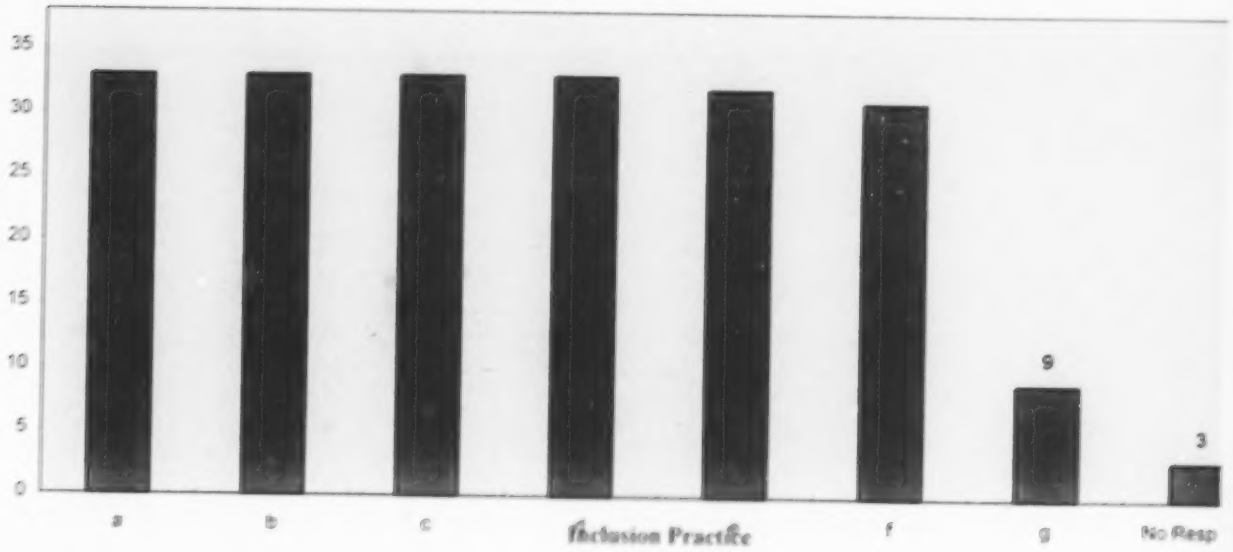
a^1 = full inclusion - all services in general classroom b^2 = inclusion - in neighborhood school, major portion of day in general classroom c^3 = minimal inclusion - limited time in general classroom

(Research Question Four)

Graph 15

Responses of State Directors of Special Education to the Seven Inclusion Practices

N=36

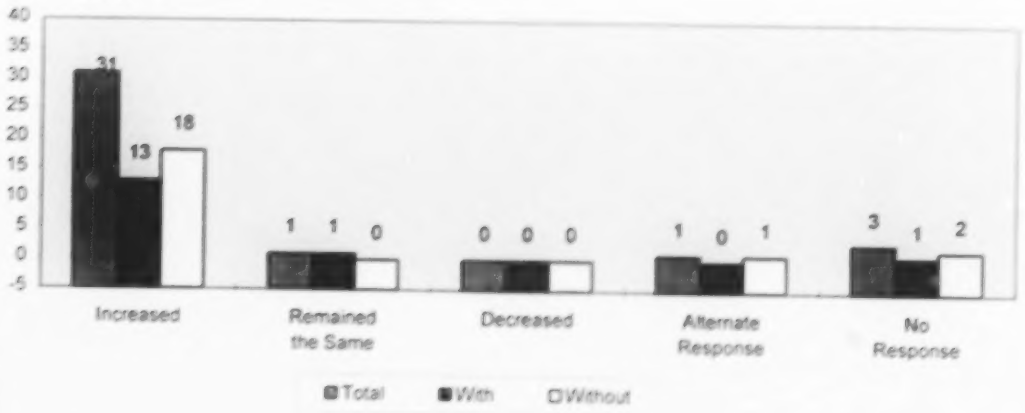


(Research Question Five)

Graph 16

Direction of Inclusion Since 1990 in the States With and Without Adopted Policies and Procedures

N=36



Major Findings

The major findings of the study were:

1. Less than one half (42%) of the thirty-six state directors of special education responding had state adopted inclusion policies and procedures.
2. The adopted state inclusion policies and procedures did not differ considerably from one region to another according to the six criteria.
3. State directors of special education were reluctant to indicate whether their states practiced full inclusion. No state director indicated their state practiced full inclusion.
4. The state directors of special education reported that their states were implementing most or all of the seven inclusive practices.
5. Approximately eighty-five percent of the thirty-six directors of special education indicated that inclusion had increased in their state since 1990.
6. Some state directors of special education appeared to view LRE and inclusion as synonymous terms.
7. State directors of special education had differing views of what constituted adopted inclusion policies and procedures.

Conclusions

The following conclusions are drawn from the major findings of the study:

1. The adoption of state inclusion policies and procedures do not appear to make an observable difference in the implementation of inclusive practices.
2. Inclusion policies and procedures vary in length and content, but most or all include reference to IDEA, IEP's, and LRE.
3. Variation exists among schools within the respective state as to the occurrence of inclusion and inclusive practices.

4. Inclusive practices are occurring in the majority of states, both with and without adopted inclusion policies and procedures.
5. The practice of inclusion has increased in the schools since 1990.
6. Many directors of special education when indicating they had inclusive policies and procedures, had LRE policies and procedures. Inclusion and LRE were used as synonymous terms.

Recommendations

On the basis of the findings of the study the following recommendations are made:

1. State departments of education, special education program division, should provide consistent definitions of inclusion and least restrictive environment to the schools in their state.
2. It is recommended that professional organizations develop a common vocabulary when addressing inclusion and least restrictive environment issues.
3. It is highly recommended that colleges and universities offering teacher preparation training programs review their curricula to assure that graduates have experience and knowledge regarding inclusive practices.
4. It would appear essential that special and general educators continue to receive staff development training in modifying and adapting instruction to facilitate effective inclusion of students in the general education classroom. State departments of education and authorities in special education must continue to promote inclusion. In order for schools to provide quality education for the included student, training is necessary.